

[By Jack Thurston](#)

Student Claudia Abbiati said she worries about the seemingly constant rise in college costs. "It's scary. It's stressful," she told NECN. "If I could have one wish, it would be that it would stop; stop increasing so much every year."

The University of Vermont senior is studying to become a speech pathologist, and predicted she'll graduate with nearly \$20,000 in debt, even after working two jobs and applying for as many scholarships as she can find. "I don't know if I'll have a job when I get out, so that's another thing I have to worry about," Abbiati said.

She hopes some relief could come from Congress. Rep. Peter Welch, D-Vt., is looking for cosponsors for a new bill that aims to reign in tuition increases on campuses nationwide. Welch said the jumps were about 8 percent last year; well above inflation. College tuition costs have risen 1,120 percent over the past three decades, Welch added.

Welch told reporters Monday that federal laws have created a lot of burdens for colleges and universities: everything from audits to complete and statistics to report. Regulatory pressure forces schools to hire more staff to do all that work, Welch said, and that contributes to price hikes for students. "No matter how valuable the service, if you price it beyond the ability of people to pay, they won't get it," the politician noted. "Congress has contributed to the problem. We have an obligation to contribute to the solution."

Welch is suggesting a new task force that includes higher education administrators. It would look for regulations that could be cut or simplified. Welch figures if schools are running more efficiently, that'll mean fewer costs passed on. The proposed legislation would also call on the federal Secretary of Education to establish the process for curbing tuition increases and set up possible penalties for not complying, Welch explained. "There's really got to be some teeth in this," he said.

Rep. Welch has been very critical of Washington's ability to get anything done lately. "Congress has been dysfunctional," he said again Monday.

But Welch also said he is optimistic that with fiscal issues taking center stage in this lame duck session of Congress and beyond, lawmakers may cross the aisle to start eyeing ways to keep even a few more dollars in the pockets of debt-strapped students like Claudia Abbiati and others behind her. "I don't know how my sister's going to do it," Abbiati said.